

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 CU-02 MCT-01 EUR-12
AGRE-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 AID-05 /090 W
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P R 042111Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 271
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA
AMCONSUL CALI

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ECON, PFOR, CO, EC
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS DEMANDED A CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATION OF CHARGES HE USED IMPROPER INFLUENCE ON BEHALF OF HIS SON. LABOR UNREST IS INCREASING AND LARGE STREET DEMONSTRATIONS WERE PLANNED FOR MARCH 4. INTERNAL COFFEE SUPPORT PRICES WERE FROZEN AND A FUND ESTABLISHED FOR PRIORITY PROJECTS IN THE COFFEE GROWING REGION. THE GOC SIGNED AN ACCORD INTENDED TO STRENGTHEN ITS TIES WITH ECUADOR. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT ASKS TO BE INVESTIGATED. PRESIDENT LOPEZ SURPRISED VIRTUALLY EVERYONE IN HIS ADDRESS ON MARCH 1 OPENING THE SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS BY REQUESTING THAT THE LOWER HOUSE INVESTIGATE CHARGES THAT HE HAD USED HIS INFLUENCE TO ARRANGE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A ROAD TO A RANCH OWNED
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BY HIS SON, JUAN MANUEL. THE ACCUSATION, SURFACED OVER A YEAR AGO, WAS INVESTIGATED BY THE PROCURATOR GENERAL WHO FOUND IT WITHOUT FOUNDATION. HOWEVER, SPECULATION IN POLITICAL CIRCLES ABOUT THE MATTER HAS CONTINUED AND MOST RECENTLY THE MEXICAN NEWSPAPER "EL EXCELSIOR" REPRINTED THE CHARGE. LOPEZ IS PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO CHARGES REGARDING HIS PROBITY. HIS FATHER RESIGNED FROM THE PRESIDENCY DURING

HIS SECOND ADMINISTRATION AMID CHARGES OF CORRUPTION, IN WHICH THE PRESENT PRESIDENT WAS ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED. LOPEZ MAY ALSO WISH TO SECURE HIMSELF, IN ADVANCE, ON THE ISSUE OF CORRUPTION, WHICH MAY LOOM LARGE IN THE FIGHT OVER THE LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY, AND COULD CALL INTO QUESTION HIS ADMINISTRATION. THE PRESIDENT IS LIKELY TO EMERGE SAFELY FROM THE INVESTIGATION HE HAS REQUESTED IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THAT EIGHT OF THE 10 MEMBERS OF THE RESPONSIBLE HOUSE COMMITTEE ARE FAVORABLY INCLINED TO HIM AS WELL AS A MAJORITY OF THE CHAMBER. NEVERTHELESS, EVEN A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH IS NOT LIKELY TO SATISFY CRITICS AND SKEPTICS.

3. PUBLIC ORDER. LABOR UNREST BECAME A MAJOR ITEM OF PUBLIC INTEREST DURING THE WEEK AS A NUMBER OF UNIONS ISSUED STRIKE WARNINGS OF INITIATED SHORT WORK STOPPAGES TO ENFORCE THEIR DEMANDS FOR IMPROVED COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS. MINISTRY OF LABOR OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN KEPT BUSY TRYING TO RESOLVE BARGAINING DEADLOCKS IN THE STEEL INDUSTRY, PUBLIC HEALTH, EXOPETROL, EDUCATORS, PORT WORKERS, AND A VARIETY OF OTHER GROUPS. MOST OF THESE DISPUTES WILL PROBABLY BE RESOLVED WITHOUT PROLONGED STRIKES, WITH THE COMMUNIST-LED PETROLEUM WORKERS UNION THE MOST LIKELY EXCEPTION. THE EFFECT SUCH A STRIKE MIGHT HAVE ON THE PUBLIC IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT AS MILITARY UNITS NOW CONTROL MOST KEY SECTORS IN THE ECOPETROL COMPLEX. WHILE THIS SPATE OF LABOR UNREST IS CONNECTED WITH THE BI-ANNUAL NEGOTIATION OF COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS, NEGOTIATIONS WHICH ARE MORE TENSE THIS YEAR BECAUSE OF CONTINUED HIGH INFLATION RATES, THERE HAVE BEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE EXPECTED ATTEMPTS BY LEFT-WING GROUPS TO EXACERBATE THE SITUATION. LEFTIST GROUPS, PRINCIPALLY THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ITS ASSOCIATED UNION GROUP, HAVE CALLED FOR MASSIVE STREET DEMONSTRATIONS FOR MARCH 4 TO SHOW SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS DEMANDS, TO PROTEST THE RISING COST OF LIVING, AND TO DEMAND THE END OF THE STATE OF SIEGE. STUDENT GROUPS ON SEVERAL BOGOTA CAMPUSES HAVE ALSO CALLED FOR PROTEST MARCHES TO COMMEMORATE THE DEATHS OF STUDENT ACTIVISTS IN PREVIOUS YEARS, AND TO SUPPORT THE DEMANDS OF WORKERS. WHILE THESE DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE, GOC SECURITY FORCES ARE EXPECTED TO CONTROL THEM. MEANWHILE THE MORE VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS KEPT UP THEIR TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN VARIOUS SECTIONS OF THE COUNTRY, WITH EXPLOSIONS CAUSING SOME PROPERTY DAMAGE IN TWO CITIES, AND WITH A FARC ATTACK ON A SMALL RURAL VILLAGE, WHICH KILLED TWO PEASANTS.

4. COFFEE MEASURES ADOPTED. THE GOVERNMENT AND THE COFFEE FEDERATION HAVE AGREED TO FREEZE INTERNAL COFFEE SUPPORT PRICES AT 7,200 PESOS PER 125 KILOS OF PERGAMINO. THE INCREASED

RECEIPTS OF THE COFFEE FEDERATION RESULTING FROM THE MEASURE WILL BE PLACED IN A DOLLAR FUND WHICH WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR THE DOLLAR COSTS OF PRIORITY PROJECTS IN THE COFFEE REGION. THE MEASURE WILL LIMIT THE INFLOW OF LIQUIDITY AND INCOME BUT WILL COMPENSATE THE COFFEE GROWING REGIONS BY MAKING DOLLAR CREDIT AVAILABLE.

5. AGREEMENT ON GEOSTATIONARY ORBIT HIGHLIGHTS ACCORD WITH ECUADORIANS. THE GOC STRENGTHENED ITS TIES WITH NEIGHBORING ECUADOR THIS WEEK WITH THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF PUTUMAYO (TEXT BEING POUCHED TO ARA/AND) DURING PRESIDENT LOPEZ' FEBRUARY 25 MEETING WITH LEADERS OF THE ECUADOREAN JUNTA. CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION WAS GIVEN TO THE TWO NATIONS' AGREEMENT TO ACTIVELY EMPHASIZE AND DEFEND, ON AN INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, THEIR CLAIMED SOVEREIGN RIGHTS OVER THEIR RESPECTIVE SECTORS OF THE GEOSTATIONARY ORBIT. THE DECLARATION, IN WHICH THE CHIEFS OF STATE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO THE STRENGTHENING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF THE ANDEAN SUBREGIONAL PACT, ALSO INCLUDED A DECISION TO INCREASE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES THROUGH IMPROVED LAND AND RIVER COMMUNICATIONS, THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE COLOMBIAN-ECUADOREAN MIXED COMMISSION, THE CONDEMNATION OF DISCRIMINATORY TARIFFS, AND A PROVISION FOR REGULAR CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN THEIR FOREIGN MINISTRIES. SANCHEZ

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